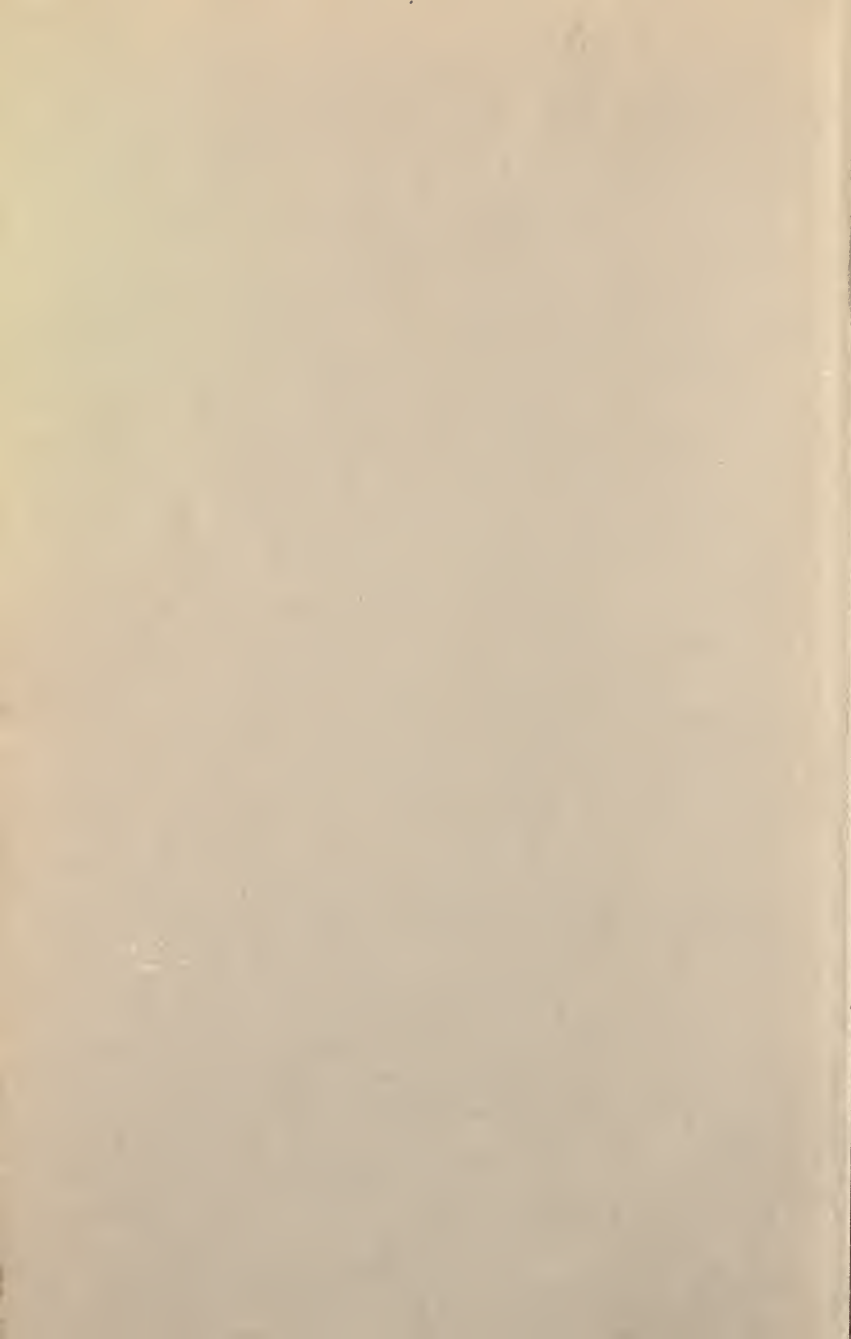


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Songs, Sighs and Curses



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By Adolf Wolff

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Songs, Sighs and Curses

By

Adolf Wolff

SEPTEMBER 1913

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By
Adolf Wolff.

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MAIN

TO LEONARD D. ABBOTT.

Dear Friend:—To whom else than to you
can I dedicate this little wreath of poems?
Weeds or flowers, without you, they would
not have been. Your interest, your sympathy,
your appreciation were the sunshine and rain
that brought them forth—to blossom for a
moment or forever.

ADOLF WOLFF.

NOTE.—All the poems in this volume were written in the year 1912-13. When asked in what sequence he would arrange his poems, Wolff threw the manuscripts in the air, saying, "Let Fate decide." They now appear in the order in which they were picked up from the floor. This is true of all except the proem and those comprising the group under the heading "To One Who Could Not Love," which appear towards the end of the volume.

THE PROEM

I sing and sigh and also curse,
Thus only can I give expression
To that which will not brook repression;
I am alive, I have a voice,
And so I sing and sigh and curse—
All life doth sing and sigh and curse.

The joy of love is in my song,
I sigh for pleasures yet untasted—
For things I dream—o'er moments wasted
And sometimes interrupt my song
With clenched fist to curse a wrong—
It is a joy to curse a wrong.

And so I sing and sigh and curse—
All life doth sing and sigh and curse.

CAPTIVES

I visited the Zoo one dreary day,
And in the lion's house I watched a lion,
A great Numidian lion in his cage,
With eyes three-quarters closed, with haughty gait,
Pace up and down the limits of his cage.

Was he oblivious of the tyrant bars,
The gaze of human eyes, his captive state,
And did he blink but better thus to see
The jungle's vast expanse?

He suddenly stood still; and, face to face,
We stood and stared into each other's eyes,
And we each saw in one another's eyes
A royal captive in a wretched cage.

IF I WERE GOD

If I were God—the first thing I would do
Would be to make all women beautiful.—
All women beautiful—and all men strong.
Then I'd resign—and make myself a man.
That's just what I would do—if I were God.

OPTIMISM

On that cold table, where shameless, without blushing
They spread their nakedness,
I see what yesterday had been a living beauty
And is to-day a corpse—
A flimsy mass of tissues and of juices,
The prey of autopsy to-day,
To-morrow prey of worms and dissolution.
And whilst the perfume of this lifeless flower,
Concoction made of chemicals and death,
Inflicts an outrage on my sense of odor,
Does disenchantment fill me with disgust?
Does Death's black wing engulf me in its shadow?
And being face to face with life's fragility
Am I made sick of life?
I am not sick of life.
I prize life more knowing how brief it is,
How insecure, how fragile and how fleeting.
I love the eyes bright with the spark of life,
I love them more knowing they'll soon be dimmed.
I love the lips aglow with warmth of life,
I love them more because they'll soon be cold.
I love all flesh that palpitates with life,
I love it more knowing it soon shall be
An inert, flimsy mass of fetid tissue.
I love the voice that rings with sounds of life,
I love it more knowing 'twill soon be silent.
I love the mind pregnant with living thought,
I love it more knowing that soon 'twill be
The tomb of thought.
I therefore let the dead bury their dead,
And like a buzzing bee in quest of flowers
I seek the flowers of life that gladly yield
The sap that love distills to joy—that joy
That is much sweeter than the sweetest honey.

THE CLOUD

There hovers over me a muddy cloud,
Enveloping me in its gloomy shadow,
That dims the native sunshine of my heart,
That dulls the keen perception of the mind,
That stunts the latent powers of the soul,
That smothers all the rising flames of hope,
That cowers the wings of genius that would soar.

I am forever followed by this cloud,
I can't escape, I cannot flee this cloud,
This muddy, gloomy, hell-begotten cloud—
The dollar sign is traced upon this cloud!

QUESTIONINGS

Is it because the sun caresses me
And makes me warm with its delightful rays
That it is mine? That it is only mine?

Is it because I frolic in the sea,
The sea that hugs me with a thousand waves,
That it is mine? That it is only mine?

Is it because I hold you in my arms
And madly kiss you, calling you my love,
That you are mine? That you are only mine?

THE LIBERTY I LOATHE

I am at large, can go this way and that,
No dungeon walls, no prison bars say halt,
When roving fancies seize upon my feet.

But am I free? Can I be truly free
When that which lives within me is repressed,
When my true self in vain from deep within
Doth clamor for the right of self-expression?

What hideous mockery of freedom this!
Put me in jail, put me in jail for life,
Let bread and water be my only fare,
Make rats and spiders my associates.

But have the light into my dungeon pour
From overhead and give me clay,
Oh, give me lots of clay—the tender flesh,
The oily, tender flesh of mother earth,

Responsive as a mistress to the touch,
And I will have a feast no king e'er knew,
And taste of pleasures that the gods would envy.
And I will make unto myself a world,

A world of which myself would be the God,
A world in which my every dream and thought,
My every feeling and my every passion
Would find embodiment in plastic form.

Oh, for a prison where I could be free!

ON SEEING THE GARMENT STRIKERS MARCH

I see a hundred thousand marching by.
I also see as many, many millions
That are in spirit also marching by.
And lo! methinks this is but a rehearsal

For the Exodus from the Land of Bondage—
And I behold with my prophetic eyes
God's chosen people crossing the Red Sea;
The workers of the world, God's chosen people,
Are crossing the Red Sea of Revolution.
And I behold the Industrial Commonwealth,
The Promised Land of plenty and of peace,
Where each one, under his own fig-tree seated,
Shall sing his praises to the Lord of Life.

THE TOILERS

Crouching they cling like vermin to the earth
And with their bleeding fingers scrape the earth
But for a little dust, their sustenance,
A little dust mixed with the sweat of brow,
The blood of fingers and the tears of pain.

'Tis not for them the sun shines gloriously,
The flowers bloom, the fruit hangs on the tree,
'Tis not for them the birds and poets sing,
Or lovely women smile.

They have to crouch and cling and sweat and scrape
But for a little dust—their sustenance.

PANEROTICISM

I love all women's smiling eyes,
I love all women's tempting lips,
I love all women's loving hearts,
I love all women's tender skin,
I love all women's glowing flesh,
I love all women's weakness,
I love all women's strength.
I love! I love! I love!

APHRODITE

I've seen a Venus not of marble carved
By some great sculptor's hand in ancient Greece,
Unearthed in a mutilated state
By archaeologists in quest of ruins
And pedestaled in temple of fine art.

The Venus I have seen was made of flesh,
Of ordinary, living, human flesh,
More beautiful than statue e'er could be.
She stands behind a counter in a store
From morning until night dispensing wares—
A living Venus at five dollars per.

THE TYRANNY OF RHYME

Inane coquette, depart from me,
Thou siren known as Muse of rhyme,
Thou fain wouldst make thy slave of me,
To give thee all my thought, my time,
And all the love that's in my heart,
I know thee well, depart! depart!

I love a nobler Muse than thee,
She's simple, free, intense, sublime,
Her rhythm has sweeter melody
Than e'er could have thy wanton rhyme.
I gave to Rhythm my soul, my heart,
O Muse of Rhyme, depart! depart!

LINES INSPIRED ON MEETING A LADY

To A. L.

I look at life as an astronomer
Looks at the star-filled sky.

Life seems a sky to me, all human beings
Rotating in their orbits are as stars.
Some are obscure and some are luminous,
Some give the light and warmth to solar systems,
Some shed on lovers' heads soft lunar light.
Some, like the comets, cosmic vagabonds,
Are ever tramping the sidereal roads,
And others, myriad-massed in endless stretches,
Compose the glory of the Milky Way.

I look at life as an astrologer
Believing in the influence of stars,
Their influences evil, beneficial.
Perplexed I ponder o'er the laws mysterious
That govern all the movements of the stars.
And I am troubled in my inmost being
At the appearance of a new-found star
As on the threshold of a mystery.
There hove into my sphere a new-found star
Of primal magnitude, magnificent,
Whose magnetism most irresistibly
Attracts me to itself.

Am I to be the happy satellite
Of this fair human sun whose smile or frown
Could make me be a fertile Earth or Moon,
A fertile Earth or frozen, barren Moon?
Oh, will it just continue in its course,
Rotating in its orbit and recede,
Recede, recede, and leave me far behind
Obscure and cold and sad and all alone? . . .

OSCAR WILDE

The work was done.
The spirit-moulders of immortal souls
Wiped from their brows the sweat and washed their
 hands,
And standing by, in full contentment gazed
Upon their wondrous work.

A masterpiece! it was a masterpiece!
A genius to be born unto the world,
One more to swell that galaxy of stars
That makes the cosmic bosom swell with pride.
Another inextinguishable star
To scintillate throughout eternity.

The angels stood, heads bowed in reverence
Before what was to be the poet Wilde,
And as they stood, these proud progenitors,
In blissful contemplation of their child,
There fell upon them, as a shadow cast
By purple clouds upon a limpid lake,
A sadness that no human voice could tell.

Forebodings of the suffering of Wilde
Depressed them so that, kneeling down, they wept.
They wept over the dire humiliation
Awaiting him who is the pride of God,
And over man's stupidity they wept—
The colossal stupidity of man.

IMPERIALISM

With one great gesture of my love-mad arms
Would that I could embrace the entire world,
The entire world of love-inspiring women.

With one unending pressure of my lips
I wish that I could kiss the entire world,
The entire world of love-inspiring women.

With one great spasm of ecstasy supreme
Would that I could possess the entire world,
The entire world of love-inspiring women.

THE CHILDREN OF THE POOR

The children of the poor are little plants
That grow in sandy soil midst rocks and weeds
And rusty cans of tin, and other junk
Within the gloomy shadow of a wall,
The gloomy shadow of a mildewed wall;
Poor little plants! poor children of the poor.

THE CALL OF SEX

Know you that bottomless and boundless sea,
Each heaving billow whereof is a woman?
Oh, how my love-parched body craves to plunge
Into the soothing substance of this sea! . . .

Oh, for the joy of absolute abandon
To the caressing furore of this sea;
The frantic joy of breaking all restrictions,
Of daring all the dangers of this sea!

The ecstatic and the harrowing sensation
Of rising, ever rising on a wave,
A giant wave that rises, ever rises,
And then to be replunged into the deep!

The all-absorbing, all-inclusive deep.

What if the mouth doth swallow liquid bitter;
What if the heinous sharks men call disease
Snap at my flesh, infecting me with poison,
And even what if that mysterious mermaid,
That moon-pale Undine claim me as her own
And seal our union with the kiss of death?

What of it? Does not all life end in death?
Give me the death of Tristan and Isolde:
I die for life and love,—I fear not death.

IMMORTALITY

At dawn of day the stars die one by one.
They only seem to die, but do not die.

There is no death for humans, or for stars.
What we call life and death is only rhythm.
It is all cadence, measure, rest, inflection,
The poetry, the music of the spheres.

The universe is one stupendous poem
Whereof the suns and stars are words and letters,
And we frail humans, punctuation marks.

TO LIVE OR NOT TO LIVE

To be or not to be is not the question;
The question is, to live or not to live.
Alive or dead or only vegetating,
One thing is sure, we cannot help but being.

To live! to be alive; to live intensely!
To live with every fibre of the frame,
With every sinew, every nerve and muscle;
To live like this, or not to live at all.

But we are cowards, we are fools and misers,
Afraid to live—afraid to pay the price—
The price of youth,—the price of youth is age;
The price—the price of joy is pain.

And disenchantment is the price of love.
And Life—the price of Life is Death.

Come, let us live, and let us live intensely.
Life! Life! more Life! more Life at any cost.

MY RICHES

Behold in me one richer than a king,
Richer than Croesus was or Solomon,
Aye, richer even than a Rockefeller.
And lo! the gilded portals of my palace
Are thrown wide open, and the spacious vaults,
Staked full of treasures even to o'erflowing
Remain unguarded, and I welcome thee
To enter and partake of all my riches.

My palace is my heart; my wealth, my treasure
Is love, immeasurable, boundless love.

DEPRIVATION

The world is like a tapestry to me,
Immense and wonderful, where interwoven
With art most consummate by masterhand
I see a maze of beings and of things.

I can but see a little at a time,
My sight is limited, the view is vast,
The picture disconcertingly complex.
But often, here and there, a brilliant spot,
A woman's figure in life's tapestry
Attracts my gaze and holds me in its spell.

And, like a child that's crying for the moon,
My hands would grasp that which delights mine eye,
To press it fondly to my happy heart.
Alas, the world, as tapestry and tomb,
Will not give up its own.

A SPHINX

I like to see a woman wearing furs,
Long-haired and dark and vicious looking furs,
Strong smelling, soft, exotic looking furs,
Contrasting strongly with her brilliant flesh,
Her tender, warm and angel-tinted flesh.
I love the angel and the beast in women.
That's why I like a woman wearing furs.

EXCUSE ME, MUSE

'Tis not the hour to sing of pink-hued vapors
So softly sailing under azure skies;
Nor of the shadow warm and so mysterious
Cast by the lashes of a woman's eyes.

'Tis not the time for soft euphonious sighing
And holding converse with pale lunar light.
'Tis not the hour for musing and for dreaming,
Excuse me, Muse, I must go out and fight.

And I will fight as long as infants suckle
In vain at parched breasts devoid of milk;
As long as my poor sisters sell their bodies
For bread and rags, while parasites wear silk.

As long as slave and master, thief and pauper
Remain such terms as may to man apply,
So long, I say, my lyre shall be a weapon,
My song shall be the rebel's battle cry.

NOEL

Tormented Galilean who art Lord
Of those that crucify thee every day
And every hour and minute of the day
And every hour and minute of the night:
With pious glee they celebrate the night
That witnessed thine appearance upon earth,
That night when angels chanted "peace on earth."

They chanted "Peace on earth, good will to men,"
And thou wert crowned with thorns by hands of men
And thou wert spat upon by mouths of men
And thou hast been betrayed by kiss of men;
Condemned by men and crucified by men,
Aye, crucified and deified by men.

And every year for many centuries,
On Christmas eve for many centuries,
In churches and cathedrals Christians sing
Their gladness of the coming of the Lord.
The organ's thunder glorifies the Lord,
The priests and ministers exalt the Lord,
The infant Lord the virgin Mary bore;
On Christmas eve it was in Bethlehem:
And whilst they fete the babe of Bethlehem,
Ten thousand babes on earth die painful deaths
And millions live to live lives worse than death
And still the massacre of innocents
Goes on relentlessly. Poor innocents!

LINES TO THE WOOLWORTH BUILDING

Imposing pile of pale and polished stone,
Cathedral-like in thy solemnity,
Thy rectilinear grandeur awes my soul,
And makes me shudder!
Monstrous sacrilege, O when before
Has thing so big been made for end so small?

Unholy Temple of the priests of lucre,
How most appropriate thy pallor is,
So like in color to the tint of bones—
Thy slender, upright lines so much like bones—
So much like children's bones.

How like unto the pyramids thou art;
The tyrants' tombs, built by a million slaves.
And like the pyramids, ere long
Thou'lt be the relic of an age gone by.

THE ARTISTS

They have been born to model and to mould
The shapeless clay into expressive form
Even as gods! to seize the fleeting shades,
The subtle hues of things that pass or stay
And make them live and glow intensely.

They have been born to tell their wondrous dreams
In rhythmic stanzas full of strength and grace,
To plunge into the very depths of things,
To seek the precious essence that is fit
For distillation to symphonic strain.

Require them not to leave their sacred sphere,
To mix with common vendors in the mart,
To traffic their creations and to throw
The priceless pearls of genius to the swine
For but a bowl of vinegar and gall.

O bring to them the little bread and milk
Which they must have to live, and if you can
Rejoice to give them honey. Be to them
What ravens were unto a prophet once.

Does not the beauty they create or dream
Atone for all our ugly deeds or thoughts,
Even as the saints who pray for those that sin
Sustain the equilibrium that must be
In order that the world may not be doomed?

Eternal malediction fall on those
Who mock or crucify these chosen ones
And let them be thrice blessed who help to clear
Life's rugged road of thorns for those who pass
And passing, leave this world more beautiful.

CAIN REFORMED

Am I my brother's keeper? Yes, indeed,
I keep him, aye, I keep him hard at work.
I also keep the fruit of all his work
And of his children's work I keep the fruit.

And when he does not keep the laws I make
That give me power to keep him hard at work,
I am his keeper, keeping him in jail.
Am I my brother's keeper? Yes, indeed.

GOLGOTHA

On the Golgotha of mine inmost being
There stands a crucifix,
And in the deepest recess of my being
In perpetuity Good Friday reigns.

And always in the stillness of the night,
The endless night within mine inmost being,
I hear the moaning and the supplications
Of him that's crucified within my being.

I see the wounds of side and hands and feet,
The wounds that glow like rubies in the night,
That cast a lurid glare upon the night,
Those mystic wounds in number like the senses.

Four horrid wounds upon the hands and feet,
One on the side, thus making five in all,
Just as the senses, making five in all.

And in the endless night within my being
I hear the moaning and the supplications.

"Oh, tear me from my cross," entreats the Christ,
"For I am Joy, thy God, the son of Life.
Oh, tear me from my cross," entreats the Christ.

That cursed instrument of agony,
Is conscience; human conscience is the cross—
The cross whereon our Joy is crucified.

My Lord, I will redeem thee from thy cross,
And give thee burial in mine aching heart,
Whence thou shalt rise and henceforth ever reign
Over the Kingdom of the blessed flesh.

IDOLATRY

I stood before a leg in the museum,
A marble leg, a mutilated leg,
Supported by a rod of polished bronze.
This leg of some hermaphroditic god
Was carved in Greece, when ancient Greece was
young.

In deepest reverence I stood and gazed
Upon this relic of an absent god.
And as I stood I wondered if perchance
Idolatry is not this very act,
That thus enshrines an ancient piece of stone,
Whilst living sculptors are compelled to waste
In fruitless idleness that precious power
Which carves the Victories of Samothrace.

Idolators, ye worship graven stones
But are indifferent to the gods that carve them.

TO ARTURO GIOVANNITTI

Arturo Giovannitti, fellow worker
In song and in revolt, sing on! sing on!
The battling warriors in the war of classes
Have need of your inspired, inspiring voice,
You are the rebel, leader, poet, prophet,
You have already worn the martyr's crown.

If there be in me just one spark of envy,
It is that I was not like you in gaol.
I envied you that most supreme distinction
Of living in the shadow of the cross
With all the sacred shades of martyred rebels,
A fellow worker of departed Christs.

NIGHTMARE

I had a dream, I had a horrid dream.
I dreamt that Byron travels for a house
That handles wines from Portugal and Spain,
That Shelley is a cashier of a bank,
That Keats is valet to a wealthy Jew,
That Oscar Wilde lays bricks, that Edgar Poe
Is selling silks and satins on the road,
And that Walt Whitman, he of noble height,
Is manager of a department store.
And I would have dreamed on, had not disgust,
A flood of dire disgust, awakened me,
And I myself was forced to rush downtown
To live the life I shudder at in dream.

LINES WRITTEN ON SEEING HENRI'S
PAINTING OF
THE LADY IN BLACK VELVET

The Lady in black velvet is the night,
The deep, uncanny, weird, mysterious night,
The witching, troubling, awe-inspiring night,
Serene and silent, sweet and subtle night,
Tempestuous, tragic, black and feverish night.

The Lady in black velvet is the night,
Her robe of black as black as blackest night,
Enfolds a world—a world of sleepless night,
A world of sighs, of cravings and of crimes,
Of maddening joys, of languors that consume,
Of pains unbearable, of livid fears,
Of nightmares and of dreams.

Then there's the sombre gray of shifting clouds
Whose masses rent asunder now reveal
The radiant luminary of the night,
Her silv'ry, radiant face is Queen of night.
The Lady in black velvet is the night.

THE BABE

Fruit of a moment of supremest bliss,
A passionate embrace, a long drawn kiss,
Soft, pink and warm and chubby little thing,
Most helpless being, despotic as a king.

Third cousin to the gold-fish, the kitten and the chick,
As free from care as they are, as shame-free and as
 quick

To feel that life means living and living must be joy,
That nothing is of value unless it be a toy.

A SCENARIO

Scene I.

The time—a glorious summer afternoon.
The place—somewhere along the Palisades.
Rocks here and there; some trees and many bushes.

A youthful artist, seated on a rock,
With great strokes paints the sun-illuminated Hudson.

A fair young woman enters on the scene,
Absorbed in picking many kinds of flowers.

The youthful artist, catching sight of her,
Stands up and drops his palette and his brushes.
And when she sees the youth she drops the flowers.

They stand in silence looking at each other.
He then approaches her to raise her flowers—
And then she smiles, and he says foolish things,
Deliciously absurd and foolish things.

The insects are abuzzing, and the leaves—
The foliage of the bushes and the trees
Are whispering—are gossiping in whispers.

He takes her by the hand and kisses her,
He kisses her and takes her in his arms,
And carries her behind a clump of bushes.

Scene II.

The time and place and scene just as before.
From left to right there enters on the scene
Quite simultaneously a man and woman.
Each reads a book while walking, so absorbed
That they well-nigh collide with one another.
He begs her pardon which, of course, she grants.
He asks her if they have not met before,
Her face seems so familiar, and she says:
Perhaps he saw her somewhere at a lecture.
And so they start to talk about their books,
About their lectures and about their books.
They seat themselves upon a rock and talk,
And talk and talk and talk and talk and talk.
The insects are abuzzing and the leaves—
The foliage of the bushes and the trees
Are whispering, are gossiping in whispers.
And from behind the softly swaying bushes
Escape the sounds of kisses and of sighs,
The kisses and the sighs of youthful lovers.
And all the time the woman and the man
Sit arguing, discussing and discussing
Psychology, sociology and ethics.
So different it is behind the bushes.
And while some hug and kiss and others argue,
A sudden gloom spreads over everything.
The azure sky is now a sky of ink,
The lightning flashes and the thunder claps,
The shower is terrific'ly intense.
Both couples find an overhanging rock,
A scanty shelter 'gainst a raging storm.
A blinding lightning flash, a thunder clap,
All four lie dead.
Is there a moral?
Guess!

THE TEMPLE

Round, full and fertile is her abdomen,
Even as Mother Earth.
O! tree of life bearing the fruit of love,
O! precious shell a precious pearl enclosing,
O! wondrous instrument whereon love plays
A fiery rhapsody,
The echo whereof is a human life.
O! blessed mother of the child of man.

Ye fools, detach your gaze from godless heavens,
God is right here if you would worship God,
The mystery of life and love is God,
And every pregnant woman is God's temple.

SHELLEY

Lucifer! dripping with celestial splendour,
All aglow with cosmic rebellion,
Thundering forth pious blasphemies,
Chanting sacrilegious hymns,
Thy voice is like unto the trumpet sounds
Of the Archangels of the Apocalypse
Calling the dead to life.
Meteor fallen from the bosom of infinitude
Into the common clay,
Strange visitant from another orb,
Permeated with the music of the spheres,
Replete and radiant with rarest gems,
Perplexing, exciting, soothing, bewitching.
Lucifer! Prometheus! Dionysos! Shelley!

THE SCULPTOR AND THE CLAY

The sculptor, man, in woman mostly sees
The clay of which to model gods of love.
Some, cunning little cupids only are,
The little rascal gods of light flirtation,
Who like the fire-flies on a summer night
Are luminous a moment—and that's all.

While others are the serious gods of love,
Majestic and intense as life itself,
Mysterious and perplexing as the Sphinx,
Relentless as the furies or as death,
As maddening as poison of the snake,
As soothing as is balm upon a wound,
And sweet as that which passeth understanding.
As sweet as that and sometimes just as bitter.

Such are the statues man, the sculptor, moulds
Of woman—clay.

CONTEMPT

I spit upon the laws that thieves have made
To give the crooked strength to rob the weak.

I spit upon a country full of wealth
Where millions live in squalor and in want.

I spit upon a flag that waves above
A nation made of masters and of slaves.

I spit upon religions that defend
A hell on earth, and preach a life to come.

I spit upon all morals that contend
That joy of life is not life's highest end.

I spit upon the education that
Makes pygmies out of what might have been men.

Upon this whole damned system do I spit,
And while I spit—I weep.

WILLIAM MORRIS

Dreamer of dreams—dreamer of golden dreams,
Explorer of the rainbow-lands of yore,
Columbus of Arcadian Continents,
Poetic founder of Utopian states.

Dreamer of dreams? Dreamer of only dreams?
A master worker with the mind and hand
Who made the beautiful and useful wed,
An alchemist who turned all work to art.

Dreamer of dreams? Maker of wondrous things?
A knight in mortal combat for a cause,
A sower of emancipation's seed,
A master builder of a better world.

DON JUAN'S SONG

From maids yet in their spring-time teens
To full blown thirty summer queens,
I love them all!

From golden blondes and deep brunettes
To Titian-locked one ne'er forgets—
I love them all!

From fairies frail or plump or slender
To women built with queenly splendor,
I love them all!

From damsels pale and melancholy
To matrons gay and widows jolly,
I love them all!

From maidens unsophisticated
To syrens well initiated,
I love them all! I love them all!

EASTER ON FIFTH AVENUE

Capital best qualifies the weather
That Easter Sunday donned for the occasion
And the parade was also capital,
It was indeed a capital parade.

The gorgeous gowns, the stunning Easter hats
Were capital and those hand-made complexions
Down to the escorts groomed with perfect style
Down to the sermons that the preachers preached
In fashionable churches were most capital.

Indeed the sight I saw that Easter morn
Along Fifth Avenue was capital,
Upon the sidewalks silently and slow
The grand cortège of capital marched on.

And whilst I was enjoying this grand sight
There rose before my mind another sight:
I saw the street between the sidewalks filled
In compact mass with wan and worn spectators
Who were in silence viewing the parade,
It was a mob of children, men and women
Whose pallid faces and whose piteous rags
Gave to the spectacle a capital contrast,
'Twas Easter, Easter, lo! The Christ has risen!
Upon the whole the show was capital.

CONTEMPLATION

I went into a house of many lofts,
And in each loft I saw a thousand men,
And women, too, and children, too, I saw.
And all around arose a deaf'ning roar—
The roaring of machines o'er which were bent
The toilers toiling at their tiresome task.
And as I stood and gazed upon this scene
I wondered why it was—I wondered why

I went into a house of gilded halls,
And in each hall there shone a thousand lights,
And many men and women also shone.
Delightful music mingled with perfume.
Around luxurious tables, diners sat
Enjoying luscious viands, mellow wines.
And as I stood and gazed upon this scene,
I thought of toilers and I understood.

CONFIDENCES

I have to go to work to win my bread,
When oft upon my way the Muse of song,
Espying me from far approaches me
And takes me by the hand as tenderly
As would a sister take her little brother.
She whispers words as sparkling as champagne,
As warm as blood, as pure as morning dew,
And so enchants me that I cannot help
But yield unto the tempting muse of song.
She takes me from the world's drear, dusty road
And leads me into that mysterious park
Where lies the limpid lake of inspiration.
The flowers of life and death grow in this park—
Of love and hate, the flowers of joy and pain,
Of smiles and sighs, of laughter and of tears,
The blooms of hope and those of disillusion.
All, all these flowers grow in this wondrous park.
I drink some water from the Muse's palm,
The water of the lake of inspiration.
And then in silence do I wend my way
Through rows of silent and mysterious flowers,
Inhaling all the odors of the flowers,
The sweet and bitter odors of the flowers.
And like the bee, I also make some honey,
Alas! my honey is not always sweet.
Perhaps because the flowers of life are bitter.
Then I am harshly driven from this Eden
By the compulsion of a god I hate,
And I must go to work to win my bread.
The honey of the poet has no market.
Tempt me no more, dear Muse, or else I'll starve.

IN THE LIBRARY

As she sat facing me the other day
Reading a book, while I was writing verses,
Or rather trying to, for I could not
Detach my gaze from her bewitching visage,
Nor could my mind in rhythmic furrows flow,
Pursuing thoughts to her all unrelated,
When like the heaving billows that are yielding
To the attracting powers of the moon,
My every thought by her has been attracted.
I thus bethought me: "Wherefore write I poems,
When here, before me, breathes a living poem,
Compared to whom, all poems are as dust
Besides a sweetly smelling, blooming flower."
So I lay down my pen and gazed at her.

BYRON

The thought of Byron wakens in my mind
The vision of a solitary tree
Titanic and contorted on a cliff
That overhangs a wild abysmal sea.
Its mighty root, a maze of tentacles,
Has put a lasting clutch-hold on the rock,
Much like the miser's fingers on his gold.
Within its arteries the sap of life,
The procreative juice in torrents flows,
And gushes forth luxurious vegetation.
The foliage-covered head is always raised
In bold defiance of the elements.
Undaunted by the tempest's fiendish rage,
Calm under the concerted stare of stars,
The fickle lover of a fickle moon.
On balmy days or peaceful summer eves
The rendezvous of master-singer birds.
Perennial, rich, melodious and sad,
Passionate and desolate and wild
And beautiful and always beautiful.

CHIAROSCURO

I met a plum-hued Venus late one night,
Live specimen of pure Egyptian art.
The regal amplitude of tropic zones,
Their rich luxuriance breathed on her face
And radiated from her clothed form.

Her eyes shone with that lustful brilliancy
Of eyes of jungle prowlers who at night
A-sniffing and a-growling hunt for mates.

Her mellow, soft and sing-song voice was whisp'ring
Enticing promises of untold joys
To taste of in this paradise of jet.

Alas! the curse of value, price and profit
Indelibly was branded on her brow,
The brow that ages past was of a savage.
Oh! thou hast conquered glorious Christian progress.

DESPONDENCY

I sadly watch the hours go by,
The hours, the days, the months, the years,
And what's called life shall soon go by,
And helpless and with fruitless rage
I watch the hours of life go by.

And I must curse when I would bless,
And I who am all love, must hate,
And I who have been born to sing
Must spend myself in moans and tears.

And must I perish on this rock
A cruel God has bound me to?
Will not some Hercules ere come
And make me free?

IN MEMORIAM

Within the mansion of my memory
There is a sumptuous chapel, where at times
I kneel in deep devotion at the shrines
Of all the blessed women I have loved.
I burn for them the incense of my thoughts;
Before their sacred images I lay
The flowers of my purest sentiments,
And on their altars piously I light
The pallid candles of my vain regrets.

I oft hold retrospective rendezvous
Within the chapel of the loves of yore.

SPRING SONG

I too shall sing thy glory, Spring,
Oh, season in thyself a song;
In every tongue thy name doth ring
With music we remember long.
Fruehling! Primavera! Spring!
Thy name to whisper is to sing.

Why should I seek sweet melody
And softly sounding words to say
All that the springtime means to me?
Why should I make an effort, pray,
When Fruehling! primavera! spring!
To whisper only is to sing.

TO A FRIEND

You sigh because you are not loved.
You only think you are not loved.
I also sighed as you now sigh,
Because I thought I was not loved.
But I was loved—how I was loved!
She lay awake at night and dreamed
Of me, who thought I was not loved.
Some loves like blooms that blush unseen,
Remain unknown and unconfessed,
And we oftimes are best beloved
When loved with love in silence shrined.
So be not sad, dear friend, nor sigh,
But feel assured there is a heart
In this wide world that beats for you.

I SAW THREE NUNS

I saw three nuns go by the other day :
Three upright coffins slowly gliding by.

Funereal, black and chilling to behold,
The ghastly shadows of a defunct past.
The worms of ignorance and superstition
Give to these dead, the semblances of life.
The past has not yet buried all its dead.

I saw three nuns go by the other day :
Three upright coffins slowly gliding by.

A WOMAN LOVES ME

A woman loves me!

'Tis not of her I sing whose womb has been
The primal cradle of my tender self;
I mean not mother-love.

A woman loves me!

'Tis not of her I sing who also sprang
From that same source whence also I have sprung;
I mean not sister-love.

A woman loves me!

I sing of her who "from the mobs of life"
Has chosen me as him to whom alone
She will unlock her body and her soul
To welcome all my love.

ELIZABETH GURLEY FLYNN

(The Workers' Jeanne d'Arc)

She too a vision had and voices heard:
She heard the groans of slaving, starving workers:
She had a vision of their liberation.

She also mounted steed and armor donned.
The soap-box or the platform is her steed.
Her coat of mail defiance of the powers.

She too to victory an army leads.
Her army is the risen proletariat,
In arms against their pitiless exploiters.

She too is hated by the church and state.
They'd burn her at the stake if they but dared,
Condemned for witchcraft or some other crime.

She too shall live an ever-shining glory,
In human history, in human hearts—
An even brighter glory than Jeanne d'Arc.

The Maid of Orleans routed but the English,
And to a worthless king restored a throne,
To sway a sceptre o'er a land of serfs.

Lead by Elizabeth we'll rout the masters
And to the workers of the world restore
The earth itself and all its joys and riches.

Let all men rally round her blood-red banner
Which bears the motto of the revolution:
"Death to all masters! Freedom to all slaves!"

JEALOUSY

As you peruse those heavy, dusty volumes
With tense attention hour after hour,
Whilst totally indifferent to me,—
To me, who sees in you the book of books,
To whom the very cover of this book,
Your outward aspect, is more interesting
Than the contents of all books ever printed.

Is it a wonder I would like to build
A mammoth pile of all the books there are
And let the raging fire consume them all?

MISERS

I know of misers meaner than are those
Who lay awake at night to guard their treasure,
Which is in their possession only dust,
A sordid, useless heap of gilded dust
That might have given peace and bread to many.

The misers whom I mean are fair to see,
Delightful to converse with and to kiss;
They fascinate us with their wondrous eyes
As serpents fascinate the little birds.
They draw us closer to them, ever closer,
Then suddenly like serpents they coil up
And put beyond our grasp their queenly treasures,
Alas! in their possession to remain,
But useless, vain and perishable things
That might have given ecstasy to many.

SWINBURNE

Algernon Swinburne, is there not in thee
Something akin to bells that ring at sea?

In their sound so clear
There is little cheer,
When their knell I hear
I recoil with fear.

Though thy voice be clear as the day's light,
It is pregnant with mystery, death, and night.

OUR LADY OF INFINITE MERCY

I often think of a mysterious woman—
There must be somewhere a mysterious woman,
Mysterious and most marvelous of beauty,
Most beautiful,—miraculously kind,
Indeed a kindness passing understanding,
So great a kindness that it seemeth madness.
It seemeth madness, for she sallies forth
At dead of night into the dismal streets,
Into the dismal and deserted streets,
Monotonously criss-crossing the city,
The monstrous, lightless, heartless, sleeping city,
Where prowling as the vermin shunning light,
Or derelicts adrift on dreary seas,
She seeks the disinherited of joy
She seeks the stunted, the disfigured children,
The starved, diseased and the discouraged children
Of stepmother society, seeks them out,
Whom everybody shuns and no one loves.
She seeks them out and gives herself to them,
This queenly woman, marvelous of beauty,
Entirely gives herself to those of whom
The thought alone makes shudder with disgust.
She gives herself even as the twilight enters
A fetid, vermin-ridden, mildewed dungeon,
A whiff of heaven in a life of hell.
Oh, have you, have you ever seen that woman,
That beautiful, that kind, mysterious woman?
She is our Lady of Infinite Mercy.
Blessed be our Lady of Infinite Mercy!

A PAGAN'S PRAYER

I sought the shrine of Eros and I prayed:—

O God omnipotent, O God supreme,

O God of love who art the God of Gods,

Behold thy worshipper upon his knees

Prostrated in the dust.

Let not my supplications rise in vain

From depths iniquitous to heights sublime.

O grant me my request, good God of love.

Unlock for me thy secret treasure house

And make me master of the arts of love.

My heart conceives great symphonies of love

That my poor body cannot execute.

I am a Beethoven, I am a Wagner,

My orchestration needs a thousand pieces,

But am restricted to a shepherd's reed.

Reveal to me the secrets of the ancients,

Instruct me in the art of love long lost;

That love of time when Gods and humans mingled.

In love I am a God, in love expression

I am alas! a frail, a weakling human.

O Eros! Eros! Eros! God of love,

Give me the power to love as Gods can love.

NIETZSCHE

A sombre silhouette
Against a sun-rise sky
In solemn solitude,
The wanderer goes by.

The shadow that he casts
Upon the plains below
Strikes terror to the hearts
Of those that do not know.

O messenger sublime
Who hailest from that land
Where joy and beauty reign;
If they could understand! . . .

If they could understand
The message that you bring,
They'd strew your path with palms;
Hosannahs would they sing.

Strength superceding faith,
Joy superceding fear:
The Super-Christ has come;
The Superman is near. . . .

TO A NEGRO BELLE

You make me dream of distant tropic climes,
Luxurious vegetation; nights serene
By burning passion made tempestuous,
The witching scent of rare exotic flowers
That sooth and render sweetly languorous,
Of music soft and weird, whose savage rhythm
Compels each fibre of the frame to dance.

I see you as the princess of an isle
Whose jungles are replete with beasts of prey,
And whose vast forests ever are alive
With cries and frolickings of birds and apes;
Whose villages of bamboo huts are full
Of dusky-hued and happy naked people.

Your simple hearted subjects pay you homage;
Prostrated in the dust, they weirdly chant
Thy praises, even as in my own way,
I sing your praises, sweet, exotic princess.
Oh, let me enter your enchanted realm,
And make of me your happy, humble slave.

WALT WHITMAN

Mountain-like he towers, a Matterhorn
Midst many minor peaks ;
And like a mountain, mighty, vast and wild ;
A finger pointing into boundless space,
A head raised high above the shifting clouds,
A heart that beats in unison with all,
An eye that first beholds the rising sun
And is the last to see her parting glory,
A clarion-call to freedom,
A gesture of revolt,
A world-encircling brotherhood embrace,
An exaltation of the lowly,
A vindication of the truth,
A glorification of the human body,
A declaration of the right of all
To live, to love, to dare and to do,
A hymn to life, a rhapsody of joy!

LIFE-LUST

My mouth—the mouth of my whole being waters
For all the fruit upon the lap of Life;
The luscious fruit of Life, (delicious fruit,
All running over with the juice of joy.)

Life seems a banquet and my gourmand senses
Would gorge themselves with all good things thereof.
My taste, my touch, my smell, my sight, my hearing
Would drink the seasoned vintages of Life,
And relish all Life's rarest fruits and viands.

Content to go whene'er the feast is over
Content, the feast was not prepared in vain.

ON A TALK OF SPINOZA

Durant spoke of Spinoza yesterday
And I sat list'ning, feeling, meditating.
And now and ever afterwards will feel
And live and think more deeply than before,
For having heard Durant speak of Spinoza.

Spinoza! what a mighty, mighty name!
All Alexanders, Caesars and Napoleons—
Mere specks of dust upon a polished lense,
Compared to that poor polisher of lenses.

He polished lenses for myopic eyes,
The world's myopic eyes hath need of them—
And long will need them,—poor myopic world.
My own sight seems improved since I have heard
Durant speak of Spinoza yesterday.

THE REVOLT OF THE RAGGED

We who have but rags to wear,
Let us go out on strike
And face the robber-master class
In all our naked might.

Do they not hold that man is made
In the image of his God?
So we refuse to desecrate
The image of their God.

No longer will we soil our limbs,
These beautiful, these wondrous limbs
With filthy, fetid rags.

Where is the beast so wild,
The reptile or the worm so base in kind,
Would not disdain the rags "creation's kings"
Disgrace their bodies with?

Oh be not shocked at our forced nakedness,
Ye masters who refuse to clothe your slaves.
Do you not steal the wool that we have shorn,
The cloth we weave, the garments that we made?
You stole our clothes, behold us naked now.

Let us arise and from our bodies tear
The fetid uniform that brands us slaves.
In countless masses let us rally forth
And through each pore of our free body shout
Our right to life, to liberty, and joy.

I'VE SEEN A PRINCESS

I've read of princesses in fairy tales
And I have sometimes dreamed of princesses
But not until to-day have I beheld,
Beheld or ever spoken to a princess.
Yes, I have seen and spoken to a princess
In body and in mind; in thought and gesture,
Indeed, in every way a perfect princess.

Since I am not some mighty potentate
In whom it would not seem as sheer presumption
To lay his heart and domains at her feet,
Would I at least could be a humble page
Forever in attendance on his princess,
To serve her and to worship her in silence,
And be allowed as wages for his hire
To breathe within the shadow of her charms.

But though my princess be reality,
My hopes, my aspirations, my desires,
Alas, are dreams, mere dreams, alas, mere dreams.

THE GREAT DISCARD

I see a mighty junk-heap rising high,
Old bibles, crosses, crescents, six-point stars
And other symbols, idol's fetiches—
The bloody tools of greed and superstition,
That have tormented man for centuries,
Disfiguring his body and his mind.
I see the flags of all the various nations,
In whose defense men slaughtered one another
Upon this junk-heap also; and the books
Wherein the laws are writ, that give to man
The power over man;
And all the institutions that have helped
To make of man an abject slave or tyrant,
These, too, are on this junk-heap.

THE SCULPTOR'S RHAPSODY

I am a God!

I am drunk with the joy of creating.

At my touch form comes out of chaos.

With a handful of clay I build monuments,

Vaster than the pyramids,

More mysterious than the Sphinx,

As startling as the Colossus of Rhodes.

My statues are austere as ancient cathedrals,

Their silhouette effaces the sky,

Their shadows engulf entire cities.

I am a God!

I am drunk with the joy of creating.

ATAVISM

O, have you ever heard the gutter's call?
E'er felt the strange attraction of the sewer?
Or ceded to the urge from underneath,
To wallow in the mire, to plunge, to sink
Into the frightful abyss of perdition?
Were you e'er tempted from some siren's lips,
To cull the bliss, you know, is venomous?
Or did you feel the satanic desire,
To soil and mutilate the sacred image
Of that ideal you worshiped all your life?
It is the atavistic voice that's waking,
The dormant beast in you. Beware! Beware!

TO ONE WHO COULD NOT LOVE

I

You told me that you love the water,
The cascades' roaring, rushing water,
The rivers' gently flowing water,
The pools' mysterious silent water,
The erring brooklets' whisp'ring water,
The oceans' moaning, hissing water,
The oceans' seething, sighing water,
It's thundering, carressing water.
My love for you is also as the water,
The roaring, rushing, silent, whisp'ring water.
The thundering, the seething, sighing water.

Oh, love me, for my love is like the water,
Did you not tell me that you love the water?

II

I've been a profligate till now,
Have squandered of the treasures of my heart
In reckless fashion.
Henceforth my beloved,
Each precious scrap of love,
Each feeling, thought or passion,
Is yours alone.
My very life is yours.

III

You sometime make me dream of fair Granada,
Of olden days of Moorish reign and glory ;
At other times you make me feel the gloom
Of Christian Spain, sepulchral and morose.

You are as the Alhambra when you smile,
Gold-tinted, graceful, radiating joy.
But when you frown or are indifferent,
Then like to the Escorial you are,
Depressing, full of sombreness and chill.

IV

I strolled through lonely by-paths in the park,
It was the hour, it was the mystic hour,
When 'tis no longer day, nor yet is night.
When o'er all nature hangs a solemn hush,
And everything is peaceful and serene.
And thus I strolled along and thought of her—
And then I sat upon a rustic bench
And thought of her,—and only thought of her.
And o'er all nature hung a solemn hush;
And I was sad, and it was growing dark.
And as I sat there on the rustic bench
Close by to me I heard two voices speak.
They spoke Italian. Softly did they speak,
And there was sadness in their voices too.
One spoke of Beatrice as angel might
Have spoken of the queen of all the heavens;
The other spoke of Laura as a bard
Would speak of her who might have been the queen,—
The queen of every kingdom of the earth.
I turned my head and seated by my side
I saw the sad, illustrious Tuscan bards,
The requiem of whose unrequited love
Reverberates throughout eternity.
I did not rise and go, but kept my place.
Is not my love as great as was their love?
And is not she as beautiful, as cold,
As hopelessly indifferent and cold,
As ever Beatrice and Laura were?
And so I also spoke about my love,
Then we were silent sitting side by side.
Upon that rustic bench in Central Park,
Along a lonesome by-path in the park.

It was the hour, it was that mystic hour
When 'tis no longer day nor yet is night;
And o'er all nature hangs a solemn hush,
And everything is peaceful and serene.
Then they both went away so quietly
That I was unaware that they had gone
Until I turned my head and saw them not.

V

My heart is like a man condemned to death,
Who in the corner of his gloomy cell
Hugs one last spark of hope.

Bright as a diamond in the dark of night,
And as a diamond difficult to crush,
Is this last spark of hope.

VI

Since Orpheus with the magic of his music,
Could charm the wildest beast, why could not I
Enthrall you with the music of my love?
Is not love's music magical enough,
Or is your heart stone deaf?
Even if so!
I will perform a miracle and cause
Your heart to hear love's music.

VII

And even if you loved me not,
If you but knew the pain I feel
When you but breathe a word that's harsh,
When you betray the faintest frown;
And when you mock me for my love,
Or chide me for the least caress,
If you but knew the pain I feel.

Aye, even if you loved me not,
You ne'er would frown at me or mock
My love for you, or harshly speak,
Or bid me not to kiss your hand;
Instead you'd treat me as a child,
You'd treat me as a child that's sick,
And patiently you would submit
To my caress; you would allow
My feverish hands to stroke your hair,
My quivering lips to kiss your brow,
My famished eyes to feast on you,
And my delirious heart to spin:
To spin a spider's web of love,
To make your heart its captive fly.

Aye, even if you loved me not,
If you but knew the pain I feel,
Whene'er I think you love me not,
You'd treat me as a little child;
You'd tell me love's sweet fairy tale,
I will believe love's fairy tale.
Please tell me love's sweet fairy tale,
Aye, even if you love me not.

VIII

The sun is warm and bright,
All nature sings;
The song of love and life is in the air,
The flowing waters and the rolling hills,
The grass we tread upon, the birds that fly,
The humming insects, aye, all men, all beasts,
All things are happy in the sun's caress.

But in my heart, in my unhappy heart,
The icy blast of winter still persists,
And desolation reigns.
Your frown obliterates the sun for me,
And your indifference is worse than death.
And in my heart, in my unhappy heart,
Dire desolation reigns.

IX

This is the tale of an unhappy sculptor,
A shaft of marble radiantly white,
Whose adamantine substance would not yield
To the impassioned efforts of the sculptor.
The chisel struck the irresponsive rock
Again, again, again, but all in vain
Until at last discouraged and exhausted
He sinks down at the foot of this cold stone.

That might have been a living Galathea,
But is alas the tombstone of Pygmalion.

X

It was a sepulchre I have been wooing :
Fair to behold was she and seeming warm,
But deep within as cold as death itself,
And to love's fervent pleadings irresponsible ;
Aye, even as the tomb.
Deaf to the voice of poetry and love,
Alas ! she's doubly deaf.
It was a sepulchre I have been wooing.

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